

FIRST LECTURE ON ARCHITECTURE.

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*Delivered at the Literary, Scientific, and
Mechanics Institute, Liverpool.*

THE following is an outline report of the lecture on architecture, delivered before the members of the institute, by Mr. J. L. Thomas, on Tuesday.

Mr. Thomas having introduced the interesting subject of his lecture by remarks upon its connection with the liberal arts, and its being the only record and chronicle connecting the infancy of the world with its present state of adolescence, enlivened the spirit of inquiry which seemed to pervade all classes of society, and it might be said, ultimately, be productive of the largest and most extended benefits. He then alluded to the origin of building, which he thought little prior to the creation of mankind, and that man soon found it necessary, in his naked and defenceless state, to erect some habitation which, however rude and imperfect in appearance, would serve the purpose of shelter and defence. He thought it probable, that the first human wants and his own natural tendency were not sufficient to instruct him, he might learn from the irrational creation; and the swallow's nest or the bee's hive may have suggested hints that were by him adopted or improved, but being destitute of all elegance and proportions, could not merit the appellation of architecture, but are yet worthy of notice as the embryo of the noble edifice which have since adorned the civilized nations of the world. As wealth accumulated, decoration was added to the original objects of building, convenience and safety; for, when the few wants of nature are satisfied, and the dangers of a savage state removed, the refined mind can create artistic objects of interest and pleasure, and the cravings of necessity silenced, then the calls of imagination gain attention, and taste becomes imperative when the animal appetites are at rest. He then proceeded to show that the first great efforts of the art were devoted to religion, and that it seemed to be the prevailing opinion of the earliest and all other nations, that the greatest human skill and industry could not be more properly exerted than to display the glory of the Omnipotence! He then attempted to give an idea of the size of Egyptian architecture, as the most ancient examples of the art extant, and described the Temple of Ammon, and the subterranean of Champollion and Belzoni on discovering the colossal wonders of Carnac. After mentioning many other of the grand productions of Egypt, and shewing that they excited rather the astonishment arising from magnificence of design than the delight from delicacy of execution, he glanced at the remains of Babylon, built by Queen Semiramis under the remains of the famous Tower of Babel, and enumerated her many gorgeous works, as described by historians, which appeared more the ideal fancy of a fairy tale than a stern reality. Then Nineveh, whose greatness no city has ever equalled; and proceeded with a slight sketch of Biblical architecture. His first rude efforts exhibited in stone secured the monuments of the great and commemorative of the dead, until Solomon came and reared the temple so famous and beautiful. The lecturer then arrived at a period, the most interesting in the history of art, when Cecrops emigrated from Egypt and settled in Attica, and laid the foundation of those arts which soon, under the fostering hand of the Grecians, culminated their origin, and assumed that symmetry and form of beauty which excite lofty and pleasing sensations in the beholders. He then compared the remains of Athens with the other great existing monuments of antiquity—Thebes, Babylon, Persepolis, and Rome—and proved the superiority, not only in form, but in beauty, in memories and associations, of those master-works of the city of Minerva, which still attract the attention of the scholar and the artist of every other nation. He thought that, although men have sometimes ventured, from motives of vanity and caprice, to deviate from those models, they have commonly returned to them with the clear conviction that the only right of excellence in the pursuit of innovation; for the orders of architecture by the Greeks were advanced to that degree of perfection which the united intellect of all the civilized world

have not since been able to surpass. He proceeded for some time with the progress of the art in Greece, and expatiated upon the soothing and elevated effect of its general characteristics; yet, although it originally displayed that kind of beauty which, from the universality of its influence, appeared congenial with the human mind, it has at various times been marred by distortions, corrupted by violent taste, and motivated by ignorance. He then touched slightly upon the long train of disastrous casualties, which befel the works of the great Athenian architects, the Persian invasion under Xerxes, and its ravaging effects, their sanguinary domestic wars, the Roman conquest, and the destructive barbarism of some of the Christian emperors who imagined they were doing a service to the Deity by destroying the noblest productions of his creatures. Next, the formidable and barbaric invasions of the northern savages under Alaric the Goth and Genseric the Vandal, the irregularities committed during the cruades and the Turkish conquests. He mentioned this catalogue of disasters with the idea that it may excite those feelings of astonishment and gratitude, which all the lovers of the noble art ought to feel, in the almost miraculous preservation of its models—for the Parthenon still remains though in ruins as a guide to the admirers of the Doric. The Erechtheion, the temple of the Ionic and the Monument of Lycabettus in all its faultless elaboration of style to those of the Corinthian.

He then alluded to the great encouragement given to the arts even in little republics, as well as in the great ruling states of Greece, and instance the temple of Selinus, in Sicily, as an example, and minutely described this magnificent building. He thought he should be invading the province of the historians by tracing the revolutionary progress of the art through several centuries; he therefore rapidly glanced at a few of the great Roman structures, and thought they invariably partook more of the gorgeousness of the many nations she was mistress of mingled together, than the simple and severe forms of the early efforts in Greece. Yet she did not for moment neglect to fix the merits of one style over another, as both had their own peculiar excellences.

The Romans excelled in luxuriance of fancy, and richness of style; but in a perfect combination throughout of the highest and purest elements of taste, the Grecians bear away the palm. He then went through a clear and distinct analysis of the three Grecian and two Italian orders, commencing with the Tuscan, so the simplest, and that generally noticed first by all architectural writers; and after giving its general proportions, and the characteristic features by which it may be distinguished, by pointing to large well-shaded drawings representing the principal proportions of each order, he alluded to the Trojan Pillars as the best ancient example, and the Church of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, by Inigo Jones, as the best modern, and described the interior and exterior effect of that church. He then proceeded in the same manner with the Grecian and Roman-Doric orders; he noticed, as the sample of the order, the great temple of Minerva Parthenus, and called our attention to a beautiful drawing of the front elevation restored. In giving a minute description of the sculptures of this sumptuous edifice, Mr. Thomas lamented the great deficiency of our modern Grecian buildings in this particular, so different from its primary practice, when the temple always adorned the each order. But in these days of calculating utility, that which contributes more than any thing else to dignify the science of architecture, to raise it above mere necessity, and rank it with that of the imagination, to indicate at once the purposes of the structure, and appear in the most lively manner the position of the each order, is generally entirely omitted, or if introduced at all, on such a petty scale, and distributed here and there with such a miserly hand, that it cannot tell decidedly of itself, or its true impressions be properly tested. In noticing the Roman-Doric, he mentioned the monument erected in a grove near London, by Sir Christopher Wren, and afterwards erected in a similar manner into the details of the Ionic order, and described the Small Temple on the Ilissus as a chaste and beautiful spec-

men, contrasting admirably with the richer example of the Erechtheion, of which temple he drew an interesting picture, alluding to the many bold objects of Athenian veneration inclosed therein.

He next passed on to a review of the Composite order, and exhibited a large drawing of the Arch of Titus, in which structures the Romans generally introduced the order. He thought the subject of the drawing was most interesting object, as connected with one of the greatest events in history—the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews. But important as these associations are, it is not these alone which give to this work the interest and importance with which the professional man views it, but because it forms in itself a relic of a new and important epoch, by the introduction of the Arch in architecture, which, although it may have been practised by some of the primitive nations, was unknown in ancient Greece. And if the Romans could boast of no other inventions; if the origin of all that was beautiful and excellent in many other arts could not be traced to them; if their poets, orators, statesmen, and soldiers were not the greatest ever in existence; if they had not by their own glorious achievements made themselves masters of the whole habitable globe, this one discovery in itself would be sufficient to stamp an immortality on their name, as it in fact forms the true basis of the science of architecture, admitting of the extension and adaptation of its principles to works which the Greeks, with all their genius and taste, could not have executed. He next adverted to the Corinthian order, its supposed origin, characteristic distinctions and proportions, which were clearly exemplified by a drawing on a very large scale of the base, the capital, and the abutments, copied from the remains of the monument of Lycabettus, as sent to Sir William Chambers. The graceful and elegant proportions of the order had a wonderfully fine effect, and the frieze was beautifully enriched with a classic design by Mr. Thomas. He then compared the Grecian and Roman practices of this order, and minutely described the elegant monument of Lycabettus, as one of the finest Grecian productions, but proved the superiority of the example from the Campo Vaccino in many minute particulars. He concluded his analysis of the orders by eulogizing the liberality of the nation in procuring the inestimable treasures of the Elgin Collection. Mr. Thomas then apologized for the unavoidable technicalities of the description of his discourse; but his object was to excite a thirst in the workman after greater research into the minutiae of the science, until he is enabled to execute the component parts with truth, taste, and delicacy, without which the finest designs will be very deficient in beauty. He encouraged them to surmount all difficulties in the acquirement of such knowledge, by persevering assiduity, for they were not only increasing the power of the hand to contrive as well as the hand to execute, but elevating themselves from mere mechanical drudges to somewhat of the dignity of an artist. He then decanted upon the merits and advantages of the institutions which have been formed in almost every town in England, for the improvement of the mind and enlightenment of mechanics, and strongly urged all who were in any way connected with the building craft—all who were desirous of distinguishing themselves—of raising the character of their respective employments—of emulating the glorious works of their predecessors—of rearing the prostrate columns, and reconstructing the shattered arch, which had been so long a ruined mass, on the pure and firm basis of science; of acquiring those intellectual qualifications, which are as indispensable to the working mason as to the carpenter or any other artisan; of depending on their own resources for aid, rather carrying out their different occupations, and resting the sacred altar, attached to the "massons of the olden time"—all who wish to gain the true ascendancy and superiority as readily flowing from knowledge, he entreated to join the "Mechanics' Institution of this town, which, if supported by the hundreds for whose welfare it was chiefly founded, will be enabled to carry out their principles of teaching with a spirit and energy that will be nobly beneficial in its results. The lecturer, in concluding his discourse, sincerely hoped that the patrons of the art would more extensively